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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

January 14, 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR: JACK MARSH
MAX FRIEDERSDORF MM.G.

FROM: BOB WOLTHUIS RKW

SUBJECT: Viet Nam

I think there is near unanimous agreement that all Viet Nam military aid legislation will be very difficult to get through Congress. The vote shifts in the House and the Senate are critical. As you know, we lost the $266 million increase for Viet Nam last year by just a couple of votes and we managed to beat the Proxmire amendment to cut MASF from $700 million to $525 million by about the same margin.

I do sense some growing press support for U.S. aid to Viet Nam and while I remain skeptical about our chances, now that the President has made the decision to go for the supplemental, I think the matter will require one of the biggest efforts the Administration has ever made. Since I will be deeply involved in that effort, I would like to make some suggestions for your consideration.

For the past year at Defense we talked about Viet Nam, but we have done almost nothing in a public and Congressional Relations way to build support for the program. The story has to be told and the story has to be observed. I think we must get some Congressional people to Saigon. The American people somehow have to be convinced that this expenditure is worthwhile. Consequently, I would like to suggest a Presidential Commission or task force or whatever you call it to consist of selected Members of Congress and perhaps the public representing the entire political spectrum to go to Saigon and make their own investigation. I am aware that this entails some risks and I think it will be difficult to put the commission together for political reasons. But I am also told by the Defense people who are administering our program and the NSC policymakers that South Viet Nam can stand this type of scrutiny. If the commission could be put together and their visit resulted in a favorable report, I think we have a fair chance of winning the supplemental. It would also greatly enhance our prospect of getting a full appropriation in FY '76. If in FY '76 we experience the same cuts that we did in the last fiscal year, we will find ourselves in the same position we are today.

GERALD R. FORD L

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